

## BRIDGE TO THE PAST: EXCAVATIONS AT THE MARGATE-BLOUNT SITE

Wilma B. Williams

The Margate-Blount site (8Bd41) is located within the interior of present-day Broward County. Located approximately 12 miles from the Atlantic Ocean, this mound and village site is a relatively large complex in the eastern Everglades in an area culturally influenced by the Everglades Culture Area to the south and the Lake Okeechobee Area to the north. A large quantity of artifactual data and human skeletal material was excavated from this site during a three-year period by the Broward Archaeological Society.

The Margate-Blount site was apparently known as early as ca. 1940, when Bruce Blount, who was leasing the property, observed what appeared to be a wooden crypt filled with skeletons on the site (personal communication with Bruce Blount, 1959). In 1959, the site area was being cleared by a bulldozer to allow for the expansion of a sod farm, when the bulldozer inadvertently stuck the mound and scattered bones everywhere. Blount alerted various people, including Dr. Jack Mickey of Broward County's Medical Examiner's Office. Eventually, when the age of the skeletons was determined, other individuals were notified including the author and others who would later form the founding nucleus of the Broward County Archaeological Society.

One week after our first visit to the site a drainage canal was dredged through part of the burial mound by the Corps of Engineers. Many burials were thrown on the embankment entirely out of context, and bones and rocks were intermixed everywhere near the dredging. We cut branches from willow and myrtle and then interlaced them creating a crude bridge. Finally, a piece of galvanized tin recovered from a shed added strength and respect to our bridge to the past. Between 1959-1961, we excavated a total of 61 pits and trenches at the site (Fig. 1).

The site was surrounded by extensive sod fields, and eventually this would be the fate of what remained of the site. The area south of the site was low and swampy, and had sawgrass and elderberry growing. Before being disturbed, the mound had been about 6 feet above the surrounding terrain. Hammock flora grew on both the mound site as well as on the village site which was north of the mound.

Geologically, both the mound and village sites were composed of muck, marl, and sandy deposits. The burial mound had a yellowish sandy sediment situated on top of black muck. Burials were observed in both levels. Between the burial mound and the village site there was a lower wetland area with a sandy muck sediment that was situated upon sterile white sand.

Excavations

Excavations were conducted over a three-year period on a part-time basis. Since the burial mound had been disturbed by the bulldozer, it was necessary to work here first and remove the burials as quickly as possible. Within the burial mound area, a 15 feet wide by approximately 35 feet long area was blocked

out into 5-foot squares (Fig. 2). The graves did not always respect the square lines imposed by modern methods but for the most part they were contained within the squares. The burials were wrapped in old towels after their removal, and then later cleaned at home.

A 20-foot trench running from east to west was put through the northern third of the mound. This was excavated to a depth of five feet in an attempt to get some idea of the stratification and boundaries of the mound. The undisturbed strata not only revealed the original contour but also the remains of a possible wooden structure. Portions of two cypress logs--one four inches in diameter and another six inches in diameter--were uncovered, as were three human crania and a number of disarticulated human bones. Above the level containing the bones was a 6" - 8" stratum of buff-colored sand. This same yellow-buff sand appeared again in pit X-5 as part of a layer cake effect of eight alternate levels of black muck and yellow ash. Ripley P. Bullen visited the site at the time and said that he believed that the ash and soil levels indicated that a charnal house had been built on that location (personal communication with Ripley Bullen, 1961).

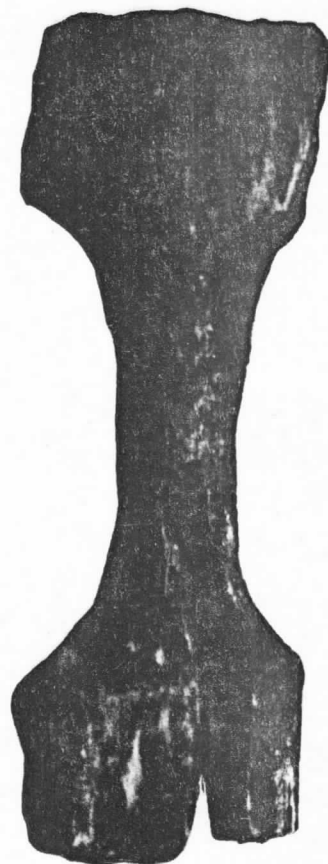
The total number of burials discussed and analyzed in this paper does not include those found in the log crypt which were exposed by the bulldozer. The owner of the property said that a framework of the log enclosure was approximately 6 feet wide, 4½ feet high, and 10 feet long. When he was a young man in the 1940s he remembers that the skeletal remains in it were "stacked like cordwood with no earth in between" (personal conversation with Bruce Blount, 1959). The field party uncovered what remained of the four posts, each about one foot high and one that was seven feet long. These are indicated in the coordinates y and yy in the map of the burial mound (Fig. 2).

#### Wooden Artifacts

Three of the burials were associated with wooden remains. Two heavy logs that could have been a part of some type of structure were found. One long pole and the three-sided burial enclosure were found on the burial mound, yet very little in the way of other types of wooden artifacts were recovered. A double-ended pestle was recovered from the west wall of pit A5 at the 18th-inch depth. The pestle is 12 cm long, and made from a heavy unidentified wood (Fig. 3). This is similar to one that Willey reports at Belle Glade (Willey 1949).

A water-logged wooden paddle was found on top of a primary interment (Fig. 4). The paddle is 5'2" long and possibly made of cypress. It was adhered so closely to the burial that there was no soil in between. At the suggestion of Dr. William H. Sears, it was kept in a white glue bath for three weeks to insure its preservation.

Figure 3. Wooden pestle.



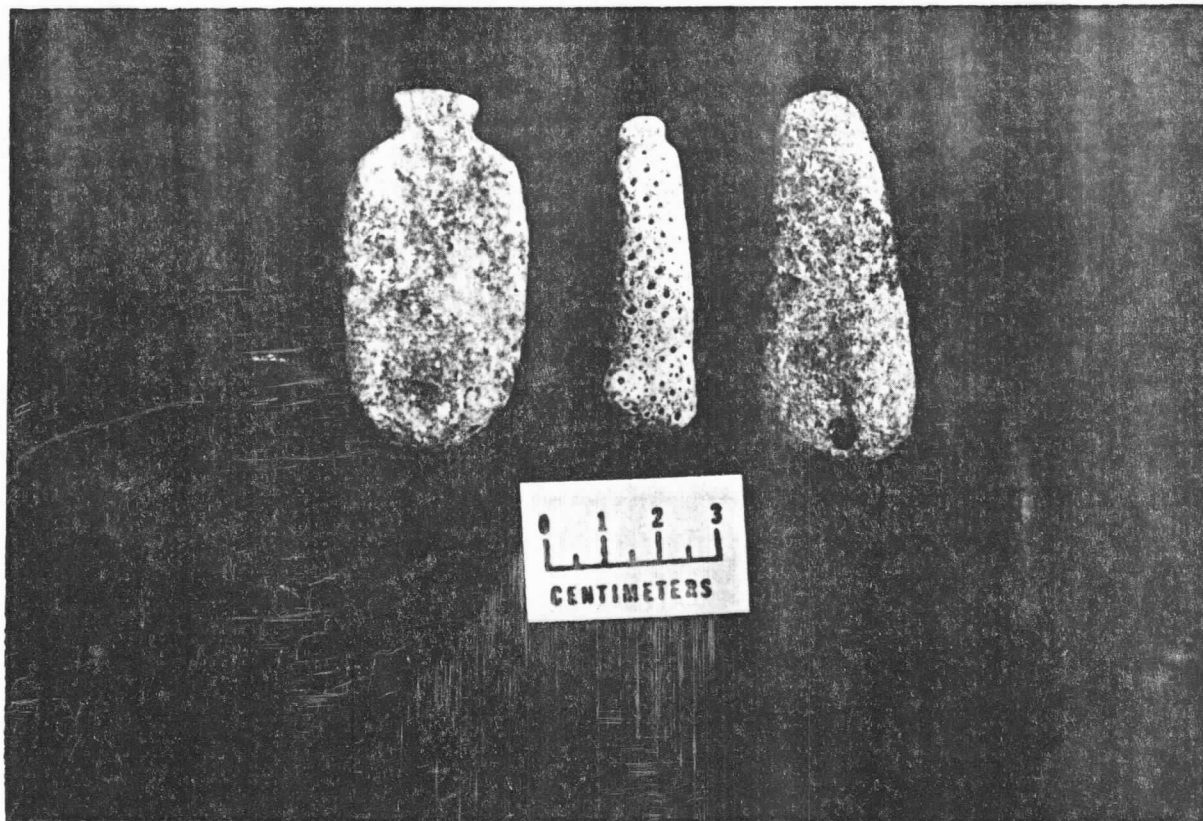


Figure 10. Lithic artifacts.

#### Historical Artifacts

Historic period artifacts were quite rare and were limited to two glass beads excavated from the burial mound. A white-faceted tube bead (Fig. 11b) was found in test pit X-2 at a 26 inch depth, and a large blue wire-wound bead (Fig. 11a) was found at a three-inch depth in test pit A-3. No other European materials were found.



a



b

Figure 11. Glass beads.

### Human Burials

Most of the human skeletons were recovered from the burial mound; however, a few were in the low area between the mound and the village site. Both primary and secondary burials were observed but no count of each burial type is available.

One of the primary burials was associated with a wooden slab that was placed on top of the individual. Within square B-4, an extended primary burial was uncovered at approximately 36" below the original ground level. When this burial was being removed a secondary child burial was found interred above its feet. The vertebrae and ribs of the child had been placed in a circle around the skull. The left scapula, left clavicle, and one pelvic bone was beneath it and the long bones were beside it. An analysis of the human skeletal material was conducted by Dr. Yscar Işcan (Işcan 1983; see this issue).

### Discussion

Excavations at the Margate-Blount site were conducted over twenty years ago. Starting to write this report less than a year ago was no easy task. I had not only to bring together the available data and artifactual material that had become partially scattered, but also I had to face some of the obvious facts that the excavation quality of our society's first project was hardly up to the kind of standards that guided our work during the last ten years. Nonetheless, despite some of these problems I felt that this salvage project probably was among the most important that the Broward Archaeological Society had ever undertaken. Not only was it the project that led to the founding of the society, but if we had not done the excavations, the site would have been destroyed without the slightest attention from any archaeologists since there was no avocational or professional archaeologist anywhere in Broward County available to do the work.

In summary, this site was a major inland site combining a village area with a burial mound. A total of 44 human skeletons were removed, although many more were lost to the dredge. This skeletal collection is one of the largest prehistoric skeletal samples available from a southeastern Florida site. Occupation of the site probably occurred as early as the Glades I period (ca. 500 B.C.-ca. 200 A.D.) as suggested by the Ft. Drum series pottery and the Deptford Linear Stamped. Occupation continued through the Glades II period (probably the burial mound was constructed during this period). The site may have been in use during the early Glades III period and at least one historic period burial is suggested by the glass beads recovered from the burial mound.

### Acknowledgements

Permission to excavate the site was given by Mr. Bruce Blount to the original small group that became the founders of the Broward County Archaeological Society. These people deserve full credit for their dedication and hard work, for without them, this report could never have been written. They are Charles E. "Pete" Allen, Helen Alperin, Milton Wolfe, Viola Sheaffer, A. J. Hans, Franklin Shelley, Jim Ward, Jill Rosenblatt, Thurlow Weed, George Slater, Harold Wirebaugh, Fred Kirsch, Marge Kirsch, Arthur Marler, Irma Nelson, Ralph Nelson, Joe Betz, Marion Henriquez, Lorraine Henriquez, Bob Pendleton,